

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

November 19, 2003

Dear Colleague:

Each year, more than 82 million Americans and their families engage in some form of wildlife-based recreation – hunting, fishing, birding, and so on. Increasingly, however, these outdoor enthusiasts are frustrated in their search for accessible land on which to pursue these activities.

In response to this growing concern, we have introduced S. 1840, the “Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Act”. Our bill – also known as the “Open Fields” incentive program – would provide payments to farmers and ranchers who *voluntarily* make their land accessible to the public for hunting, fishing, birding, and other forms of wildlife-based recreation. Other cosponsors include Senators Daschle, Dayton, Dorgan, Johnson, Kerry, Harkin, Coleman, Reid, Nelson of Nebraska, and Biden.

As the public’s desire to engage in outdoor activities increasingly exceeds the amount of land available for such pursuits, several states have struggled to address the problem. For example, 13 states currently operate “walk-in” incentive programs, but these efforts lack the resources necessary to meet the public’s growing demand for wildlife-based recreation. Thus, in developing “Open Fields,” our aim has been to build on what works in each state by providing additional funds to those programs.

Under “Open Fields,” the U.S. Department of Agriculture would provide \$50 million per year to state programs that offer incentive payments to farmers and ranchers who agree to allow public access on their land, under terms established by each state. To receive funding, interested states would describe the benefits that the state hopes to achieve by encouraging public access on private farm and ranch land – through such activities as hunting, fishing, birding, and related outdoor activities – and the methods that the state will use to achieve those benefits. But *participation by the states and individual land owners would be completely voluntary.*

Our bill also recognizes that wildlife-based recreation is vitally important to our rural development efforts. According to the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, those Americans who engage in these outdoor activities spend over \$100 billion per year in the process – a critical source of income for many of our rural communities. Yet, this economic activity is threatened by the increasing inability of average Americans to access appropriate land.

In summary, “Open Fields” is a voluntary, state-based program with the potential to be good for farm income, good for conservation, good for our struggling rural communities, and a positive force in strengthening the bond between farmers, ranchers, and the general public.

Sincerely,

PAT ROBERTS

KENT CONRAD

MAX BAUCUS

Vice Chair

Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus

MIKE ENZI

Co-Chair

Congressional Sportsmen’s Caucus

PLEASE SEE ENDORSEMENT LETTER ON REVERSE SIDE

November 6, 2003

The Honorable Kent Conrad
The Honorable Pat Roberts

Dear Senators:

We are writing to express our support for the Voluntary Public Access and Habitat Incentive Program Act of 2003, your legislation to establish state-administered, voluntary, incentive-based programs to expand public access to private lands.

In an era when more and more hunters and anglers are faced with "no trespassing" signs and more land is being converted to commercial hunting and fishing operations, this legislation is critically needed to expand access to places to hunt and fish.

This summer, *Field and Stream* magazine published the results of its 2003 National Hunting Survey. Based on that survey, *Field and Stream* concluded that a major reason for the decline of hunting in America is the lack of available habitat and access to that habitat. As representatives of one of the many groups of outdoor enthusiasts that would benefit from greater access to private lands, we applaud your efforts to enact this new voluntary, incentive-based program. We estimate that your legislation, if fully funded, would encourage landowners to open up as many as 10 million new acres of private land to the public each year, dramatically enhancing the experiences of hunters and anglers as well as bird watchers, hikers, and others who enjoy the outdoors.

A number of states already have established programs to work cooperatively with private landowners to pay for access to their lands. In fact, Kansas, South Dakota, Wyoming, Montana, and Nebraska all have very successful programs that open millions of acres of lands to the public each year, and several other states are initiating similar programs. These programs are popular with hunters and anglers as well as private landowners. In fact, due to a lack of financial resources, many states are unable to take advantage of the offers by private landowners to enroll in their access programs. By supplementing state resources that currently are being dedicated to this purpose, your legislation will provide additional income to ranchers and farmers, while expanding opportunities to hunters and anglers.

We look forward to working with you in the months to come to enact this legislation as expeditiously as possible.

Sincerely,

Theodore Roosevelt Conservation
Partnership
Wildlife Management Institute
Izaak Walton League of America
International Association
of Fish and Wildlife Agencies
Congressional Sportsmen's Foundation
National Rifle Association
Mule Deer Foundation
Pheasants Forever
American Sportfishing Association
Pure Fishing
Trout Unlimited
Bass Anglers Sportsmen Society
Ruffed Grouse Society
The Wildlife Society
Pope & Young Club
Federation of Flyfishers
The International Hunter Education
Association
Boone and Crockett Club
Sporting Goods Manufacturers Association
National Shooting Sports Foundation
North American Grouse Partnership
Texas Wildlife Association

United Association of Journeymen and
Apprentices of the Plumbing and Pipe
Fitting Industry of the United States and
Canada

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